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Update of the Current Drought Crisis and APDA Ongoing Development Program March 1st, 2005

1. Drought

1.1 In summary

As the critical situation in Teeru Woreda, Zone 4 seems to have turned a corner, Zone 1 now looms as the 'hotspot' of drought affect with thirst and lack of pasture specifically Eli Daar Woreda and north-west Dubte woreda. Eli Daar Woreda is currently tinder-dry, bereft of water and pasture. The woreda officials reported on February 21st that 70 families had walked into the woreda administrative center from Aba'a kebele claiming they had lost their entire family herd. This kebele is extremely remote on the north-western border of the woreda and APDA intends to walk there to verify this. In Zone 2, January 20th storm in Barahale Woreda, eastern part of Konnaba and Afdeera Woreda eased the situation. Dallol remains without rain relief and Eribeti is also dry.

The drought crisis remains characterized by thirst in the known drier areas of the region, animal death accountable to both disease outbreak and poor/ lack of pasture. Those herds that migrated to the highland districts in Tigray and Amhara Region are now obliged to return since the farmers in those districts are about to prepare the land for crop – growing. The contentious issue and need, that of selected animal feeding to save a milking/ breeding herd remains unresolved, without response.

1.2 Thirst

Since the one storm of January 20th in the central/ eastern part of the region that rejuvenated some grazing in Uwa, Awra, Goolina, Yallo and Teeru Woredas of Zone 4, there has been no further reported rain aside from March 1st rain storm that fell in the Awash to Gowaneh stretch, Zone 3. Critical thirst areas are in Eli Daar Woreda as apparent along the Assab Road going north to Boore and on the Sardo to Afdeera Road going north – west through the remote districts of Dubte Woreda. As of this week, APDA now has 6 water trucks delivering on the Afdeera Road and to communities proximal to the road and 3 along the Assab Road going north through Eli Daar Woreda. This is currently meeting these districts' needs but the Afdeera Road project completes in 10 days.

1.3 Animal status

In Teeru Woreda where at least 95% of the cattle herd has died and around 50% of the sheep have perished, animal death has dropped remarkably since APDA began animal

treatment 2 weeks ago. Also, since the January 20th rainstorm fell in part of the woreda and the Awra River shed water into the woreda, pasture has rejuvenated. This has now turned the tables: as of February 18th, vast animals herds from Zone 1 – Dubte district where they had been grazing cotton stubble and Geega in western Dubte Woreda began moving toward Awra and Teeru Woredas. Tens of thousands of cattle have entered Teeru Woreda and goats and sheep are grazing in Awra Woreda.

In Sifra and Uwa Woredas where grazing was not well – established after the January storm animals are beginning to die again.

1.4 Human health and nutrition status

In Teeru, APDA health workers have averted a critical diarrhea outbreak and responded directly to found cases of acute malnutrition. (Medical activity report available.) While food distribution is reportedly increased, it is equally reported as inadequate and not evenly distributed to those in need. In needy woredas, the ration assists between 2 and 3 households with 50 kgs of grain per month. Market prices are critical and goats sell for as low as 10.00 ETB and cows 50.00 ETB.

1.5 Community response to the crisis

In the Alaalu kebele of Teeru, a clan elder has organized a team of 100 youth to dig a massive pond that will eventually be around 10,000 cubic meters. A team of women sit as the youth dig boiling tea and supplying cold water. Other smaller ponds are also being constructed.

1.6 Ongoing needed response

a) Livestock needs

Critical need to intensify and widen animal treatment as well as respond to the most pasture – deplete areas with selected animal feeding is apparent. This drought is producing and likely to produce more absolute household destitution.

b) Human health

APDA health workers need to continue to respond to disease outbreak through health education/ mobilization (carcass burning), basic treatment, MUAC nutrition monitoring and vaccination. For this, the organization continues to require resources.

2. Ongoing Development Program

2.1 The literacy/ non-formal education program

Under the constraints of this current drought, teaching is extremely difficult: both the teachers and the students are moving frequently to secure their herds. In some districts, where people have congregated to gain water from tankers, student numbers have risen. Despite this, the general mood is driven by the realization of the importance of education to assure a way forward for the Afar society. Indeed, in that discussion, woreda and local leaders are expressing the importance of female education.

Within the World Bank funded Pastoral Community Development Project in Konnaba Woreda, APDA has begun a literacy campaign as the basis of selecting and training community members as health workers, community teachers, women extension workers and paravets. This campaign is greeted with much enthusiasm, particularly in the most inaccessible parts of the woreda. Again, APDA is training 39 people in Afar literacy and numeracy from Buramudayto Woreda, Zone 3 so that they can undertake health workers' training and traditional birth attendant training facilitated by ICRC.

Finally, Mille Woreda kebele leaders are undertaking literacy training, the second such training for the woreda. Within the woreda, there will now be 30 literate kebele leaders and 10 literate clan elders.

2.2 Primary health

APDA primary health workers are frantically busy following the difficulties the community is facing under drought. While measles has not reappeared in districts that were effectively vaccinated in 2002/03 (measles is apparently causing child – death in Gowaneh, Zone 3), whooping cough is troubling many communities. Currently, a group of 38 health workers are undertaking the second 3 months training of the 6 months course.

With radio – communication controlled ambulance inaugurated by the Japanese Embassy on January 15th, APDA primary health work now moves into a new era of assisting in emergency referral and improved program efficiency with base radios in 2 remote districts so far.

2.3 Responding to HIV & AIDS

The now completed community center for response to the HIV & AIDS in Logya is setting a precedent in hands - on assistance as well as serving as a youth recreation center. APDA remains anxious to respond to the critical situation of HIV spread in Afdeera, the shanty - town serving the salt – producers.

UNDP – sponsored project in Zone 5 using the methodology of 'community conversation', an idea captured from the Kambatta people, to get communities devising their own response to HIV & AIDS as well as harmful practices. This project fits well to the Afar tradition of information sharing.

2.4 Women's Issues

APDA attended the February 2,3 conference in Djibouti on Female Genital Mutilation, bringing back the declaration that any form of female circumcision is condemned. This, the organization will take up to further enhance the Regional Government stance taken in June 2004 that the practice of FGM should be punished. With the recently produced local film on FGM, the organization is well – equipped to hold further community discussions and mobilize toward stopping FGM as well as raising the rights of women within traditional marriage.

2.5 Joining APDA's View on Pastoral Development with the Government's

The final document of the December – held Afar Development Conference is now available from the organization or the www.arhotabba.com site. There is an identified forum between APDA and the Regional Government to carry the conference recommendations forward. APDA will be part of the coming government conference on development gathering the region's intellectuals.

On February 28th, the Regional Government met with APDA in Awash discussing APDA's 2005 to 2009 Strategic Plan and an assessment report of the organization's best practices. This discussion, led by the Regional President with Heads of DPP &FS, Capacity Building, Water Resources, Health, Cooperative and Afar Language Development and Enrichment Bureaus participating, concluded that APDA's relation with the government must be strengthened. SNV and Oxfam Great Britain as part of a Strategic Alliance Project to strengthen capacity to implement development in the pastoralist society were also there.

Finally, the government invited APDA to assist the government in forming its own 3 – year strategic plan and, by so doing, to include APDA's activities in that plan.

2.6 The progress in gaining a community radio

The ground-level expert assessment to establish community radio in Afar Region has been done. APDA is now taking the matter further with the Minister of Information in order to assure this utterly vital vehicle of development materializes in the pastoral society.